



# Good Teachers Are Good Learners

By A. VENKATA NARAYANA

Convinced that learning English is a basic need for students in the modern world, and eager to learn more effective ways of imparting language skills, some 100 Indian and Pakistani teachers have shared strategies, insights and ideas in workshops held in Washington, D.C., New Delhi and Lahore.

"The workshops' debate on basic issues of development, implementation and research was aimed at introducing new approaches to education reform," says Sarita Tiwari, an English teacher from the Government Model Senior Secondary School in Chandigarh who participated in all three workshops. What impressed Tiwari most was the interactive approach, as teachers shared suggestions and how different techniques would specifically help students in India and Pakistan.

The first six-week workshop—with 13 Indian and 10 Pakistani English teachers—began in June 2005 at the Graduate School of Education and Human Development at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. "We want to ensure the effectiveness of teachers by strengthening the schools as an institution and prepare diverse populations for the future," said Judith M. Findlay, a faculty member of the graduate school and coordinator of the workshops.

The South Asian Teacher Training Project, aimed at improving the

teaching of English, was sponsored by the U.S. State Department. It led to two more two-day workshops in January 2006 in New Delhi and Lahore conducted by the U.S. Educational Foundations in each country. In New Delhi, the Indian and Pakistani teachers who attended the Washington workshop shared their experiences with 50 other teachers who came from various parts of North India. The main focus of the New Delhi workshop was on how to integrate new teaching methods such as critical thinking, cooperative learning and independent writing. There were discussions on how to identify different students' learning styles and create an ideal learning community.

Many participants felt that using English as a medium of instruction would aid in cross-border understanding. "The education system in both India and Pakistan has to be more practical than theoretical so that we understand each other's complexities better. To overcome this problem, the English language plays a vital role," said Azir-ur-Rahman Dahlot, a teacher at Government High School in Hyderabad, Pakistan. The more interaction, the better, he said.

"The participants were engaging in 'classroom diplomacy' in a manner just as effective as the ongoing India-Pakistan 'cricket diplomacy,'" observed Adnan Siddiqi, chairman of the board of the U.S. Educational Foundation in India. □



Photographs by HEIMANT BHATNAGAR

Above: Judith M. Findlay; participants of the South Asian Teacher Training Project workshop.  
Below: Sarita Tiwari.